THEATERS — MOTION PICTURES

New York Tribune

MUSIC AND ART

PART III EIGHT PAGES — SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1920 — PART III EIGHT PAGES

The Stage and Its People

Madeline Van in "Hitchy Koo—1920" PHOTO BY ABBE

APEDA PHOTO

Katharine Hayden in "The Storm"

Mlle. Marguerite Spanish Dancer in "Honeydew" APEDA PHOTO

Florence Nash in "The Mirage" IRA L. HILL'S STUDIO

IRA D. SCHWARZ PHOTO

Flora Sheffield in "Three Live Ghosts"

Genevieve Tobin in "Little Old New York" CAMPBELL STUDIOS PHOTO

As We Were Saying—

By Heywood Broun

"THE FIRST YEAR" is the best comedy in New York. At least, we mean that we think it is the best.

Frank Craven went about the business of writing it in the proper way. He didn't try to remember what so and so had done in a successful comedy of last season or last month, but kept his eyes and ears open and watched and listened to people instead of actors. If somebody interrupts to ask "Are actors people?" we can only reply that we have no time to go into so difficult and perplexing a problem just now. At best, they are only one kind of people, but most of the plays which come to our theater are built not upon the folk who live next door or around the corner, but about leading men and heroines and ingenues and comic relief characters. To be sure, they are set down in the programs as bankers, lawyers, merchants, sirens and what not, but it is easy to see that they are all just actors. Such things couldn't happen to anybody else. No one else could speak so strangely.

Craven has remembered to forget mortgages and vampires and loaded pistols and all that. One of the most dramatic scenes in his play is all mixed up with a man who can't pay any attention to the crisis in his daughter's life because the Italian has forgotten to deliver the Sunday papers. With one or two marring exceptions, Craven has not bothered particularly to devise strange and unexpected things with which to plague his characters and amuse and enthrall the audience. Somebody told us once that a play simply had to have suspense, but Clayton Hamilton is not here to hold playwrights to strict accountability in the matter, and Craven manages to finish a first act very nicely without so much as a pinch of suspense. We see the young man ask the girl to marry him, and she agrees, and then they talk things over and decide to move from Reading, Illinois, to Joplin. By that time it is 12 o'clock, and the young man says goodnight and the girl goes upstairs to tell her mother about it.

Probably in a strictly dramatic sense there is not very much suspense in that, but anybody who puts real people on the stage doesn't have to bother to pop them into queer predicaments in order to set us debating what will happen. Moving from Reading to Joplin is quite enough. Personally, we spent all the first intermission in wondering whether, after all, Joplin was a better town than Reading and how Thomas Tucker and Grace Livingston would like it. We had heard that young Tucker was getting along pretty well with his real estate and insurance business in Reading, and it seemed something of a risk.

The big crisis in the lives of the Tuckers came in the second act, when Martha, the general maid, failed to appear on the eve of an important dinner party and it became necessary to impress her daughter Hattie into service. Hattie said that she has waited on table, but that she did washing best, and so it seemed pretty ticklish business. If Mr. Craven had built his situation around the arrival of the 2d Cavalry, or a pardon from the Governor, or the fate of Magnesia Copper preferred we would not have been half so excited. All these things are nothing in our life, but at the time of writing we have a cook, and such things are vital.

Hattie didn't do very well and things went so badly that by and by Grace and Tommy had a serious quarrel and she left him to go home to her mother. Some of the rest of it gave us just a suspicion that we were sitting in a theater and not really at the edge of a transparent fourth wall. The playwright just had to reunite his hero and heroine and so he arranged that somebody should whisper to him that she was going to have a baby. Mr. Craven did not remember to forget this. It has happened in plays before. In fact it is practically the universal formula of playwrights for reuniting a husband and a wife who have quarreled. There must also be some other way, or there wouldn't be so much talk about race suicide.

But, at any rate, it is not preposterous. The fight in the last act, the very sudden effect of alcohol upon the hero in the second act and his equally sudden fortune are all somewhat more of the theater than the rest of Mr. Craven's play, but all are used judiciously enough to keep the action and the atmosphere almost free of grease paint. The people talk as they should talk. There is a wealth of minute and ingenious observation of little things. The eventual arrival of the Sunday papers in the last act proves even more hilariously amusing than if one member of the cast, two, or all of them, had fallen down a flight of steps. Very real people they are and the cast keeps them that way. Craven's performance as Thomas Tucker is masterly. William Sampson, who hasn't very many lines to speak and most of those interjections in which somebody is asked to repeat something said two minutes before, has never appeared to better advantage. Roberta Arnold as Grace, and Leila Bennett as Hattie add other performances which seem to us unimpeachably good.

Our Idea of an Orgy

FIVE times a week is enough theatergoing for anybody, in our opinion, but at least those five nights need not be wasted. It would be fun never to have been to a theater in your life and then to come to New York and see in rapid succession "The First Year," "Enter Madame," "Tip Top," "The Bad Man" and "The Bat." After that the newcomer would probably become a confirmed theatergoer, but it seems to us that he might have to wait a while to have again so good a week.

Happiness? Keep It By Circulating It Is Cohan Formula

"THE dramatic editor of The New York Tribune would like to know what constitutes success—money or happiness? I am here to find out."

Thus read a note which was sent backstage in the Hudson Theater a few evenings ago, just before George M. Cohan was to make his entrance as Richard Clarke, the young attorney in "The Meanest Man in the World."

"Tell The Tribune man that it is all brought out in the play. Tell him to stay and see it."

That was the terse reply he sent out by the same courier. And then he relented and consented to talk after the first act. For a brief ten minutes he would be free of his manifold duties of the theater. Ordinarily, he spends such time working on the forthcoming "Cohan Revue" or on plans for the other plays which he has running on Broadway.

There is no middle ground with George M. Cohan. Either he refuses entirely to talk or he is altogether willing to express his views for publication. Although in this instance the latter was true, he was not unhampered.

"Oh, yes, you want to know about success," was his greeting. "Money or happiness"——

There was a knock on the door and one of the members of the cast entered. He wanted money, received it and departed.

"Money or happiness," Mr. Cohan started again. "Of course, we know by now that if a man is happy he is successful."

"Yes, but can a man be happy though broke?" he was asked.

"That's a stiff one," the energetic actor-author-producer countered. "If a man is used to certain things some money is essential for his happiness, but money is not the most important factor. What do you think, Eddie, can a man be happy, though broke?" he asked of Eddie Dunn, who has been associated with him for many years.

Eddie Dunn hesitated for a moment before replying.

"Fortunately, I have never been in wnat, so I feel hardly qualified to express an opinion on that point," he replied. "But take the vagabond in 'The Tavern.' He's broke and thoroughly happy."

"All nuts are happy," Mr. Cohan volunteered, laughingly. "Really there's only a thin thread between happiness and unhappiness, just as there is only a thin thread between comedy and tragedy. A man may create happiness for himself as easily as unhappiness. Personally I have lived too many lives and have seen too many things to be unhappy. I don't take things seriously enough to be unhappy."

All the foregoing did not come as smoothly as it is recorded, but that was no fault of the actor's. More money had to be paid out; business details and appointments which he had hoped to avoid had to be arranged.

"I'll stand for anything," he offered.

(Continued on page five)

Florence Nash Tells Her Own Story of Playing "Hussy" for "Tut-tut-ers" at Matinees

IN her association with Florence Reed in "The Mirage" in the Selwyns' Times Square Theater, Florence Nash plays the part of a veritable hussy in her characterization of Betty Bond. It is the sort of rôle with which Miss Nash has made her public very familiar, for ever since she played Aggie Lynch, the young crook in "Within the Law," she has amused and entertained the theater-going public with a succession of interesting crook and hussy types. The most noteworthy of these were her Polly Carey in "Sinners"; her Certy Green, the crook girl, in a vaudeville sketch, and her present portrait of Betty Bond, the vigorous gold-digger in "The Mirage." While the work of Florence Nash in the theater has not been confined to such characterizations, these rôles have been her most interesting ones, and those which have brought her into the greatest prominence. Certainly they have furnished her food for a great deal of thought and observation. Of the latter Miss Nash declares her most interesting study to have been that of her audiences.

"Until this season I had always believed that audiences experienced emotions en masse, but they don't—at least not at matinees," says Miss Nash. "My attention was called to that fact in the middle of one of my Betty Bond scenes by that semi-clucking, semi-sibilant tut-tut-ing sound that can be construed into nothing else than an expression of outraged feminine virtue. Mingling therewith were peals of feminine laughter, so I began to notice the audience. Lest some 'art-for-art's sake' person accuses me of neglecting my performance, I hasten to explain that comedy must be played with a sort of subconscious knowledge of one's audience, as laughs do not always come in the same places, nor last the same length of time, and a good player must watch those things just as a good driver watches ruts in the road. Hence my attempt to act and observe the audience at the same time.

"Playing a hussy before ladies is a very interesting study in feminine psychology. I can almost classify them into groups by their attitude toward Betty Bond.

"For instance, the other day, in the front row, there was a woman about fifty, whose humorous appreciation of my characterization was a delight. She got all the little subtle things I think between lines and made me feel that she realized that I was cast for the part because I have a sense of humor. She radiated an atmosphere of wholesomeness and home, and you felt that her life had been sane, but not sheltered, and that her friends and family adored her.

"Next to her was a tut-tut-er, whose every breath was one of righteous indignation. If ever she meets me in a restaurant, I'm sure she will draw her skirts aside, because she plainly believes that my characterization was due to—well, not to histrionic ability. She was one of those prissy, evil-minded, good women, who have a very clean, uncomfortable home for their family and who nag men until they go out and become willing victims of the Betty Bonds.

"Then there was a sweet little thing, about sixteen, who laughed until I began going after the men, when she began to watch the scene with the thrilled, frightened manner of the adolescent and experienced a disappointed relief when the scene didn't get 'sexy.' I'm sure her memory of my part consists of a great admiration for my blue Russian suit.

"Near her was a real Betty Bond, who seemed a little amazed at the exposé of her methods.

"One thing has particularly impressed me. Even good women must have their moments of deception, because there is a quality of recognition in the feminine laugh which greets 'I'm not deceiving him—I just don't want him to know anything about it.'

"Another thing that I've noticed is that women are on time at the matinees, and no one who has not tried to open a play with a comedy scene can appreciate the courtesy as I do."

Capitol Theater Will Celebrate Its First Anniversary To-day

To-day the Capitol Theater celebrates its first anniversary, and S. L. Rothapfel has prepared a gala motion picture and musical program in celebration of the event. Just a year ago Managing Director Edward Bowes opened the world's largest theater to the public.

The main feature of the anniversary program is Nazimova, who will be seen in a Metro production called "Madame Peacock." The story is by Rita Weiman, and gives the actress an opportunity to display the versatility of her powers in the portrayal of a dual rôle. There will be other screen features and an extensive musical program.

New Theatrical Offerings of the Week

TUESDAY—At the Greenwich Village Theater Conroy and Meltzer will begin their season with the production of Max Halbe's "Youth." Lois Churchill, Reginald Sheffield, Adolph Link, Edward Reese, Alan McAteer and Zyllah Shannon are in the cast. Emanuel Reicher directed the production.

'Mary' Didn't Know Herself When She Struck Broadway

CHOSE who are responsible for the fortunes of "Mary," who romps her way blithely across the stage of the Knickerbocker Theater, shrewdly avoided the mistake of bringing an overconfident cast into New York for the opening last Monday evening. For nearly six months Boston and Philadelphia had been charmed by Lou Hirsch's tunes and by the story which Otto Harbach and Frank Mandel tell.

Based on past experiences of other musical productions which were acclaimed outside of the metropolis, it was known that an overconfident, stale cast could not win a Broadway audience. So a few evenings before the opening, when "Mary" was still playing Philadelphia, scenes were rearranged, new scenes were put in and lines were changed. The whole ensemble, which had been going along so smoothly, felt that the play had been turned topsy-turvy and, frankly, every one was nervous on the opening night.

"We were better for the nervousness," said Janet Velie, who plays the title rôle in the spirited musical comedy. "We had become set in our ways and the changes helped us to give a better performance."

Janet Velie has been on the musical comedy stage for a little more than four years. After six months in a dramatic stock organization in Denver, her home city, she came East with her brother, who is also on the stage, and played in the road company of "The Only Girl" until she joined the Roricks-Glen musical stock company in Elmira. For eleven weeks there she played leading parts in musical comedies which had been successful in New York and on the road.

Coming to New York again, she determined to learn more about dancing and secured an engagement in the chorus of "Oh, Lady, Lady."

"Mr. Royce, the director, told me that he admired my pluck for going into the chorus after I had played leading parts and he helped me a great deal. It seemed to me the best way to learn to dance and it gave me an opportunity to continue my vocal lessons in New York. Then I was almost broke," she confessed laughingly, "and the money earned in the chorus was welcomed. I remember the four flights of stairs I had to climb and the many meals cooked over a gas jet. I am glad I did it, for it makes me appreciate everything more now."

For three months Miss Velie was in the chorus of "Oh, Lady, Lady," and then an opportunity came to take the ingénue rôle in "The Kiss Burglar" with Fay Bainter, and she accepted, later joining a special company of "Going Up" to play Edith Day's part. She had the leading feminine role in "La La Lucille" at Henry Miller's Theater, playing in it before joining the cast of "Mary."

Much credit for whatever success she has attained Miss Velie attributes to her brother. He is her severest critic

(Continued on page five)

The New Plays

PLAYGOERS have the opportunity this week to get their second wind in the race to catch up with the nimble producers. Whereas, for several months, new plays have been rushed into theaters, five, six and sometimes seven in a week, the present week offers but one new production. This is Max Halbe's "Youth," a play of the Polish border before the war, produced by Conroy & Meltzer at the Greenwich Village Theater Tuesday night.

This play, which had been seen in most of the large cities of Europe before the war, is presented to American audiences for the first time. Lois Churchill, who will be seen in the leading rôle, makes her American debut. The scenes are laid in Poland. The plot tells the story of the love of two young people who face obstacles both of religious and sinister character. Influences of heredity and environment are factors in the opposition.

For the following week two new plays are announced—"The Half Moon," which will open Monday, November 1, at the Liberty Theater, where "The Night Boat" is finishing a year's run, and "Just Suppose," which will occupy the Henry Miller Theater on the same date. Of "The Half Moon" Joseph Cawthorn is the star and reviewers out of town have accorded it high praise.

"Just Suppose," which deals with the visit to America of a Prince of Wales, will have a distinguished cast. Fred Kerr, the English actor, last seen here in "The Inferior Sex" with Maxine Elliott, will play the rôle of the British Ambassador. Geoffrey Kerr, his son, will be the Prince. The leading woman's part is assigned to Patricia Collins.

Ordinarily something like a hundred plays are launched in the course of the season in these parts to tempt the golden lure of Broadway. Up to date about one-half this number have got under way and many are suspended on the fringes of the theatrical center awaiting the opportunity to come in. The near future is likely to see the removal of certain productions, which are doing what in an ordinary season would be considered good business, in favor of plays that promise larger returns.

Lively interest attaches to the proposed visit to New York of Charles Cuvillier, Europe's best known producer of musical plays, whose operetta, "Afgar," is to open in this city November 8. Cuvillier is to arrive some time around the holidays and it is said he will probably remain a year, putting on new productions as well as some of his European successes. At one time he had five major successes running in London—"The Lilac Domino," "Sunshine of the World," "Wild Geese," "Johnny Jones" and "Afgar." "Sunshine of the World" is one of the productions scheduled for New York. "The Naughty Princess," which has had an unprecedented run of eight months in Paris, may also be seen here.

Cuvillier is enormously popular in France, where his highly creditable part in the military service of his country has endeared him no less than his service to the stage. With all his honors he is the most modest and unassuming of men. He lives in the same little Paris that he occupied as a struggling artist years ago, only it is now enriched by a priceless collection of art objects. And his generosity is almost a byword As a discoverer of stars his insight is almost weird. Among the artists he has found and trained are Jane Marnac, called the new Rejane; Rejine Flory, Lautelme and Alice Delysia, who will make her first American appearance in her latest musical comment of F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest.

Of Delysia Mr. Gest has this to say: "Delysia is a marvelous combination of talents which hitherto seemed to defy mixing. She has a wonderful sense of humor; she is a comedienne of charming magnetism; she sings with a voice which at times seems worthy of grand opera; she acts dramatic scenes like a vigorous young Bernhardt; she can dance; she can wear clothes smartly; she wins women and children with her

(Continued on page five)

Bab Decides in Favor Of a Career on Stage

BAB, aged seventeen, in Edward Carpenter's play of the same name at the Park Theater, discusses careers with her chum Jane. She has decided to write plays.

Bab—Could I do it? Last year I wrote a play on divorce—"The Trial Marriage." It was only narrowness on the part of the faculty that prevented it from being the class play. No one realizes that I am capable of dealing with life. But in that play, Jane, I MINCED NOTHING.

Jane—Do tell me about it!

Bab—I can't remember all of it, only the big scenes, where the crisi first husband comes back and finds his wife married again and happy and takes the children out to drown them, only he can't, because they can swim, and pull him in instead. The curtain goes down on notming but a few bubbles rising to mark his watery grave.

Jane—It's too touching for words, Bab! I can close my eyes and see the theater dark and the stage almost dark and just those bubbles coming up and breaking! I don't know how you think of such a thing!

Bab—Neither do I! When I finished that scene I was done out. It's really too much—living the agonies of my characters, suffering the pangs of the wife with two husbands and both living; struggling in the water with the children, the fruit of the first union, dying with No. 2 and blowing my last bubbles heavenward. After all these emotions, I'm a rag.